



NEWS

Donnafugata starts harvest two weeks early

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By Sarah Neish

Renowned Sicilian wine producer Donnafugata has revealed it began picking on 22 July, an unprecedented two weeks earlier than usual as lack of rain takes its toll.



Instagram @donnafugata

Donnafugata in western Sicily is used to high temperatures with the mercury regularly reaching above 45°C on the island. However, what is dealing the region a hammer blow is the decreasing amount of rainfall it receives.

“Between October and the end of July, there has been 35% less rain,” said Antonino Santoro, technical director and oenologist at Donnafugata’s main estate Contessa Entellina. Since May, he said, there has been almost no rain.

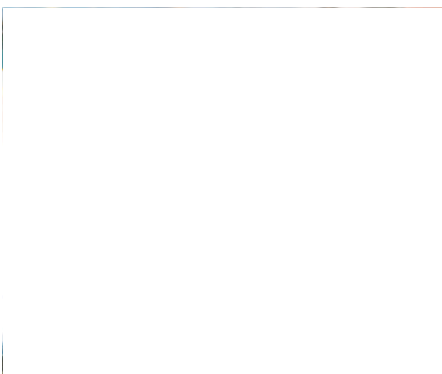
Despite upping its irrigation efforts with a “micro-sprinkler” system which delivers four litres per hour per vine, the producer has been forced to pick early, starting on 22 July at its Contessa Entellina and Pantelleria estates, before moving on to Vittoria in the coming weeks and finishing on Mount Etna around mid-September.

“In June and July, thanks to the water reserves available in the estate’s reservoirs, supplementary irrigation was carried out in many of the estate’s vineyards, supporting the growth and development of the vines,” reads a statement issued by the producer.

“The climatic conditions have led to an early harvest, particularly for the early-ripening varieties, by about 10 days compared to the usual timing. In the high-altitude vineyards, the harvest of Chardonnay and Pinot Nero grapes has just begun, as they have reached the ideal level of ripeness and freshness for sparkling wine production.”

According to Donnafugata, while overall production might be slightly lower “the grapes harvested are expected to be exceptionally healthy and of high quality.”

For the first time, Sicily’s authorities have banned agricultural workers from being out in the field between the hours of 12.30pm and 4pm, so grape pickers start at dawn before the sun’s rays are too hot.



The reality of global warming has even informed some of Donnafugata’s packaging decisions with the Sicily producer last year launching its 2022 Damarino Sicilia DOC Bianco under an innovative cork **made from plastic salvaged from coastal areas**.

Called Nomaticorc Ocean, the stopper has enabled 1.15 tonnes of ocean bound plastic to be recycled. The only snag is that the plastic used for the cork has been rescued from beaches in South-east Asia rather than Sicily. If the producer could find a way to localise the project it would help to close the loop still further.

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